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CHAPTER VII.

WHY THE ABIPONES ARE SO VIGOROUS AND LONG-LIVED.

THE Abipones are indebted for their strength and longevity partly to their parents, partly to themselves. The vigour of youth, preserved by temperance, accompanies them during the whole of their lives, and is even transmitted to their children. The Abipones never indulge in licentious gratifications during youth, and though of a fiery temperament, debilitate their constitutions by no irregularities. They amuse themselves with conversation, mirth, and jesting, but always within the limits of modesty. By a sort of natural instinct peculiar to themselves, both boys and girls hold in abhorrence all means and opportunities of infringing the laws of decorum: you never see them talking together either publicly or privately; never idling in the street. The girls love to assist their mothers in domestic employments; the continual exercise of arms and horses engrosses the chief attention of the young men.

The Indians of other nations are often shorter, slenderer, and less robust. Many of them con-

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measles and small-pox, and the cruelty of the mothers towards their offspring, have combined to render their number so small. Now learn the cause of this inhumanity in the women. The mothers suckle their children for three years, during which time they have no conjugal intercourse with their husbands, who, tired of this long delay, often marry another wife. The women, therefore, kill their unborn babes through fear of repudiation, sometimes getting rid of them by violent arts, without waiting for their birth. Afraid of being widows in the life-time of their husbands, they blush not to become more savage than tigresses. Mothers spare their female offspring more frequently than the males, because the sons, when grown up, are obliged to purchase a wife, whereas daughters, at an age to be married, may be sold to the bridegroom at almost any price.

From all this you may easily guess that the Abiponian nations abound more in women than in men, both because female infants are seldomer killed by their mothers, because the women never fall in battle as is the case with the men, and because women are naturally longer lived than men. Many writers make the mistake of attributing the present scanty population of America to the cruelty of the Spaniards, when they should rather accuse that

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Some time after my arrival, I played on the flute in the open street. The crowd of women were delighted with the sweetness of a musical instrument they had never before seen; and the youths flocked in numbers to hear it: but as soon as they approached, the women every one disappeared. The custom of bathing in a neighbouring stream is agreeable to them, and practised every day, except when the air is too cold. But do not imagine that, as syrens and dolphins are seen sporting on the same waves in the ocean, males and females swim and wash in the same part of the lake, or river. According to the Abiponian custom, the different sexes have different places assigned them. Where the women bathe, you cannot find the shadow of a man. Above a hundred women often go out to distant plains together to collect various fruits, roots, colours, and other useful things, and remain four or eight days in the country, without having any male to accompany them on their journey, assist them in their labours, take care of the horses, or guard them amidst the perils of wild beasts, or of enemies. Those Amazons are sufficient to themselves, and think they are safer alone. I never heard of a single woman being torn to pieces by a tiger, or bitten by a serpent: but I knew many men who were killed in both ways.

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away his wife, or to marry more than one. For this reason they are extremely anxious to have themselves and their husbands baptized, that they may be rendered more certain of the perpetuity of their marriage. This must be understood only of the younger women; for the old ones, who are obstinate adherers to their ancient superstitions, and priestesses of the savage rites, strongly oppose the Christian religion, foreseeing that if it were embraced by the whole Abiponian nation, they should lose their authority, and become the scorn and the derision of all. The young men amongst the Abipones, as well as the old women, greatly withstood the progress of religion; for, burning with the desire of military glory and of booty, they are excessively fond of cutting off the heads of the Spaniards, and plundering their waggons and estates, which they know to be forbidden by the law of God. Hence, they had rather adhere to the institutes of their ancestors, and traverse the country on swift horses, than listen to the words of a priest within the walls of a church. If it depended upon the old men and the young women alone, the whole nation would long since have embraced our religion.

Honourable mention has been frequently made by me of the chastity of the Abiponian women:

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it would be wrong to be silent upon their sobriety and temperance. It costs them much labour to prepare a sweet drink for their husbands of honey and the alfaroba: but they never even taste it themselves, being condemned to pure water the whole of their lives. Would that they as carefully abstained from strife and contentions, as they do from all strong drink! Quarrels certainly do arise amongst them, and often end in blood, upon the most trivial occasions. They generally dispute about things of no consequence, about goats' wool, as Horace expresses it, or the shadow of an ass. One word uttered by a scolding woman is often the cause and means of exciting a mighty war. The Abipones, in anger, use the following terms of reproach: *Acami Lanaĩaik*, you are an Indian, that is, plebeian, ignoble; *Acami Lichiegaĩaik*, you are poor, wretched; *Acami Ahamĩaik*, you are dead. They sometimes dreadfully misapply these epithets. Who would not laugh to hear a horse, flying as quick as lightning, but which his rider wishes to incite to greater speed, called *Ahamĩaik*, dead? When two women quarrel, one calls the other poor, or low-born, or perhaps lifeless. Presently a loud vociferation is heard, and from words they proceed to blows. The whole company of women crowd